US009068423B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Johnson et al.

(10) **Patent No.: US 9,068,423 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent: *Jun. 30, 2015**

(54) **WELLHEAD CONNECTOR AND METHOD OF USING SAME**

(75) Inventors: **Christopher Dale Johnson**, Cypress, TX (US); **James William Weir**, Houston, TX (US); **Dean Allen Bennett**, Houston, TX (US)

(73) Assignee: **National Oilwell Varco, L.P.**, Houston, TX (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 601 days.

This patent is subject to a terminal disclaimer.

(21) Appl. No.: **13/365,976**

(22) Filed: **Feb. 3, 2012**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2013/0199801 A1 Aug. 8, 2013

(51) **Int. Cl.**
E21B 33/12 (2006.01)
E21B 33/04 (2006.01)
E21B 33/038 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC ***E21B 33/038*** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC ... E21B 33/038; E21B 33/0355; E21B 33/03; E21B 33/035
USPC 166/368, 344, 379, 85.4, 360, 387, 345
See application file for complete search history.

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

2,609,836 A 9/1952 Knox
3,084,898 A 4/1963 Miller
3,485,051 A 12/1969 Watkins
3,492,027 A 1/1970 Herring
3,667,721 A 6/1972 Vujasinovic
4,310,139 A 1/1982 Williams, III et al.
4,431,215 A 2/1984 Moyer
4,479,506 A 10/1984 Goans
4,496,172 A 1/1985 Walker
4,516,795 A 5/1985 Baugh

(Continued)

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

CN 202064876 12/2011
GB 2112432 7/1983

(Continued)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Cameron: Drilling Systems—DL Annular Blowout Preventer, product specifications, [online], [retrieved on Nov. 8, 2011]. Retrieved from the Internet: <URL: http://www.c-a-m.com/forms/Product.aspx?prodID=ecd6ef4e-19dc-4ea-ad47-94689e36b61c>.

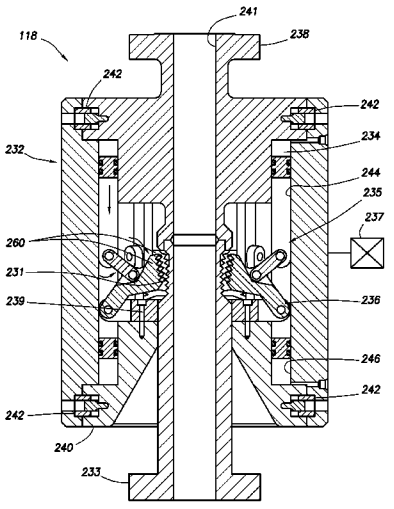
(Continued)

Primary Examiner — Nicole Coy
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — JL Salazar Law Firm

(57) **ABSTRACT**

The techniques herein relate to a blowout preventer a wellhead of a wellbore penetrating a subterranean formation. The blowout preventer includes a housing having a bore therethrough, a segment carrier positionable in the housing, and a piston. The segment carrier includes a carrier ring for receiving the mandrel and a plurality of segments pivotally movable radially thereabout. The piston is operatively connectable to the plurality of segments and actuatable for moving the plurality of segments between a disengaged and an engaged position about the mandrel.

24 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

4,526,406	A		7/1985	Nelson
4,557,508	A		12/1985	Walker
4,606,555	A		8/1986	Adams
4,606,557	A		8/1986	Coffey
4,630,680	A		12/1986	Elkins
4,693,497	A		9/1987	Pettus et al.
4,708,376	A	*	11/1987	Jennings et al. 285/315
4,709,726	A		12/1987	Fitzgibbons
4,902,044	A		2/1990	Williams et al.
4,902,045	A		2/1990	McGugan et al.
4,904,228	A		2/1990	Frear et al.
5,116,017	A		5/1992	Granger et al.
5,143,158	A		9/1992	Watkins et al.
5,178,215	A		1/1993	Yenulis et al.
5,305,838	A		4/1994	Pauc
5,332,043	A		7/1994	Ferguson
5,507,467	A		4/1996	Mott
5,588,491	A		12/1996	Brugman et al.
5,662,171	A		9/1997	Brugman et al.
5,971,076	A		10/1999	Taylor et al.
6,016,880	A		1/2000	Hall et al.
6,070,669	A		6/2000	Radi et al.
6,089,321	A		7/2000	Morrill
6,129,149	A		10/2000	Beall
6,609,572	B1		8/2003	Anderson et al.
6,609,734	B1		8/2003	Baugh
6,966,382	B2		11/2005	Buckle et al.
7,367,396	B2		5/2008	Springett et al.
7,614,453	B2		11/2009	Spiering et al.
7,779,918	B2	*	8/2010	Cowie et al. 166/373
7,814,979	B2		10/2010	Springett et al.
8,016,042	B2		9/2011	Spiering et al.
8,474,537	B2		7/2013	Voss et al.
2003/0106693	A1		6/2003	Jennings et al.
2003/0151254	A1		8/2003	Baugh
2004/0102069	A1		5/2004	Singeetham et al.
2005/0034870	A1		2/2005	Buckle et al.
2005/0269102	A1		12/2005	McCanna et al.
2006/0197339	A1		9/2006	Oestergaard et al.
2009/0014184	A1		1/2009	Voss et al.
2010/0006298	A1		1/2010	Voss et al.
2010/0078174	A1		4/2010	Spiering et al.
2010/0155074	A1		6/2010	Rodriguez
2011/0000670	A1		1/2011	Springett et al.
2013/0175055	A1		7/2013	Hart et al.
2013/0199801	A1		8/2013	Johnson et al.
2013/0199802	A1		8/2013	Weir et al.
2013/0264070	A1		10/2013	Miller et al.
2014/0318809	A1		10/2014	Joensen et al.

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

GB	2406151	3/2005
WO	20050108739	11/2005
WO	2013098560	7/2013
WO	2013152233	10/2013

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

GE Oil & Gas: Hydril Pressure Control Annu-Flex, product specifications, [online], [retrieved on Nov. 8, 2011]. Retrieved from the Internet: <URL: http://hydrilpressurecontrol.com/__pdf/pressureControlBrochures/GE__HY__Annu-Flex__FS__080610.pdf>.

Integrated Equipment: Products: Elastomer Products—Annular BOP Seal Kits, product specifications, [online], [retrieved on Jan. 8, 2011]. Retrieved from the Internet: <URL: http://www.integratedequipment.com/annular__bop__sealkits.asp>.

T3 Energy Services: 7022 Annular BOP, product specifications, [online], [retrieved on Jan. 8, 2011]. Retrieved from the Internet: <URL: http://www.t3energy.com/Portals/0/pdfs/pdf/7022%20Annular%20BOP.pdf>.

T3 Energy Services: 7072 BOPS, product specifications, [online], [retrieved on Jan. 8, 2011]. Retrieved from the Internet: <URL: http://www.t3energy.com/Portals/01/pdfs/pdf/7072%20BOP.pdf>.

T3 Energy Services: 7082 BOPS, product specifications, [online], [retrieved on Jan. 8, 2011]. Retrieved from the Internet: <URL: http://www.t3energy.com/Portals/0/pdfs/pdf/7082%20BOP.pdf>.

Wikipedia (online free encyclopedia) [online], Blowout preventer, [retrieved Jan. 8, 2011]. Retrieved from the Internet: <URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blowout_preventer>.

Examination Report for EPO Patent Application No. 13705052.2 dated Oct. 10, 2014, 2 pages.

International Preliminary Report on Patentability and Written Opinion for PCT/US2013/023671 dated Aug. 5, 2014, 7 pages.

Akers, T.J., et al., "Formation and Removal of Hydrates inside wellhead connectors", SPE 124409, SPE Annual Technical Conference and Exhibition held in New Orleans, Oct. 1, 2009, 15 pages.

International Search Report for PCT Patent Application No. PCT/US2013/035269 dated Mar. 28, 2014, 5 pages.

Cooper Cameron Corporation, Cameron Division product brochure "Collect Connector Comparison" (Jun. 1999) 8 pages.

Dril-Quip, Inc. product brochure "DX Series Subsea Connectors" (2008) 8 pages.

VetcoGray product brochure "H-4 Subsea Connectors" (2008) 7 pages.

GE Oil & Gas product brochure "Hydril Pressure Control Annu-Flec TM" (2010) 2 pages.

GE Oil & Gas product brochure "Hydril Pressure Control GK Annular Blowout Preventer" (2010) 2 pages.

GE Oil & Gas product brochure Hydril Pressure Control GL Annular Blowout Preventer (2010) 2 pages.

GE Oil & Gas product brochure "Hydril Pressure Control GX Annular Blowout Preventer" (2010) 2 pages.

GE Oil & Gas product brochure "VetcoGray Subsea Wellhead Systems" (2009) 12 pages.

Invitation to Pay Additional Fees and, Where Applicable, Protest Fee for PCT Patent Application No. PCT/US2013/035332 dated Mar. 28, 2014, 5 pages.

International Search Report for PCT Patent Application No. PCT/US2013/035332 dated Jun. 2, 2014, 7 pages.

International Search Report for PCT Patent Application No. PCT/US2013/035280 dated Mar. 28, 2014, 4 pages.

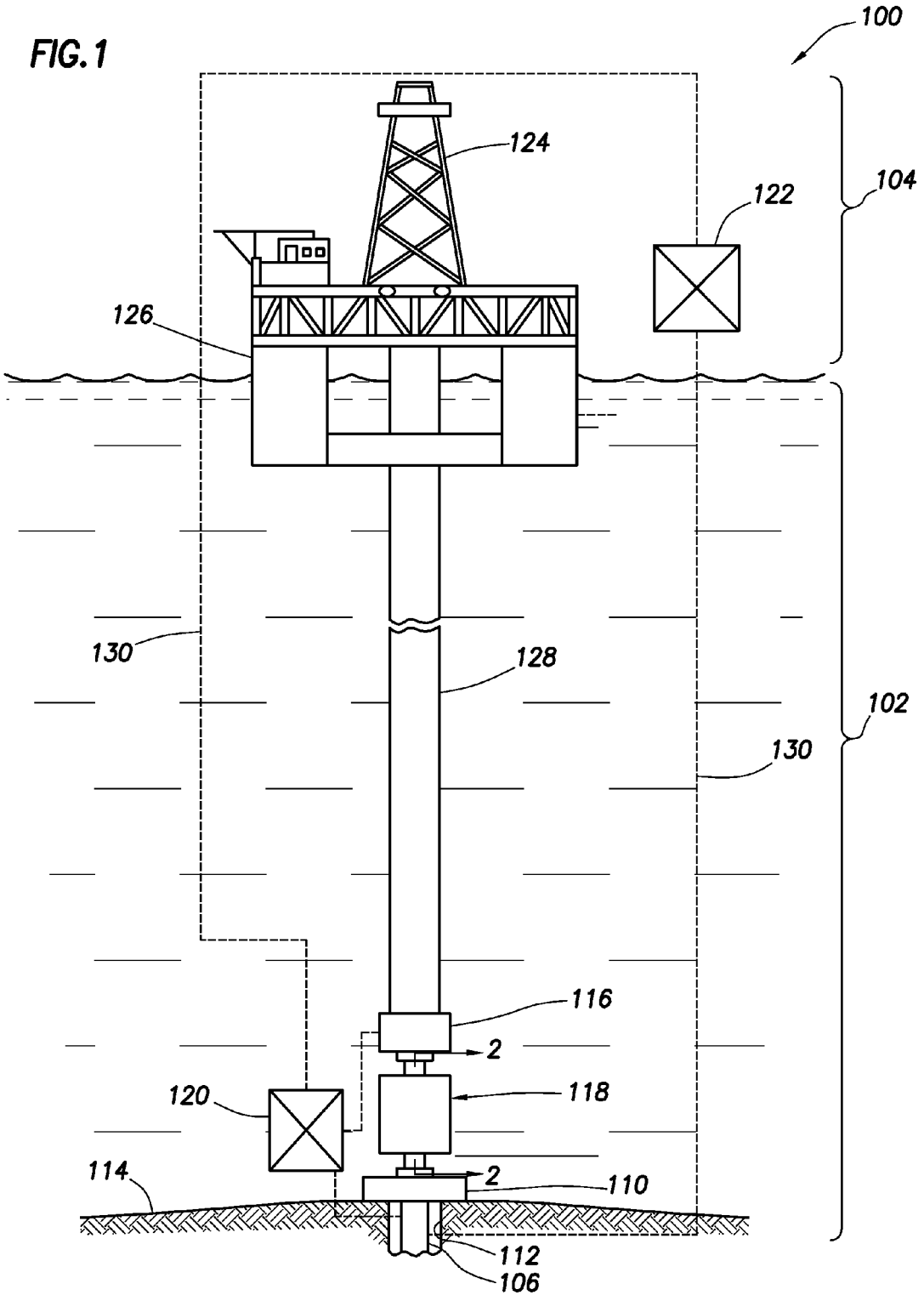
International Premliminary Report on Patentability and Written Opinion for PCT Application No. PCT/US2013/035269 dated Oct. 7, 2014, 9 pages.

International Preliminary Report on Patentability and Written Opinion for PCT/US2013/035280 dated Oct. 7, 2014, 9 pages.

International Search Report for PCT Patent Application No. PCT/US2013/023671 dated Feb. 26, 2014, 5 pages.

* cited by examiner

FIG. 1


100
124
122
104
126
130
128
102
130
116
2
120
118
114
2
110
112
106

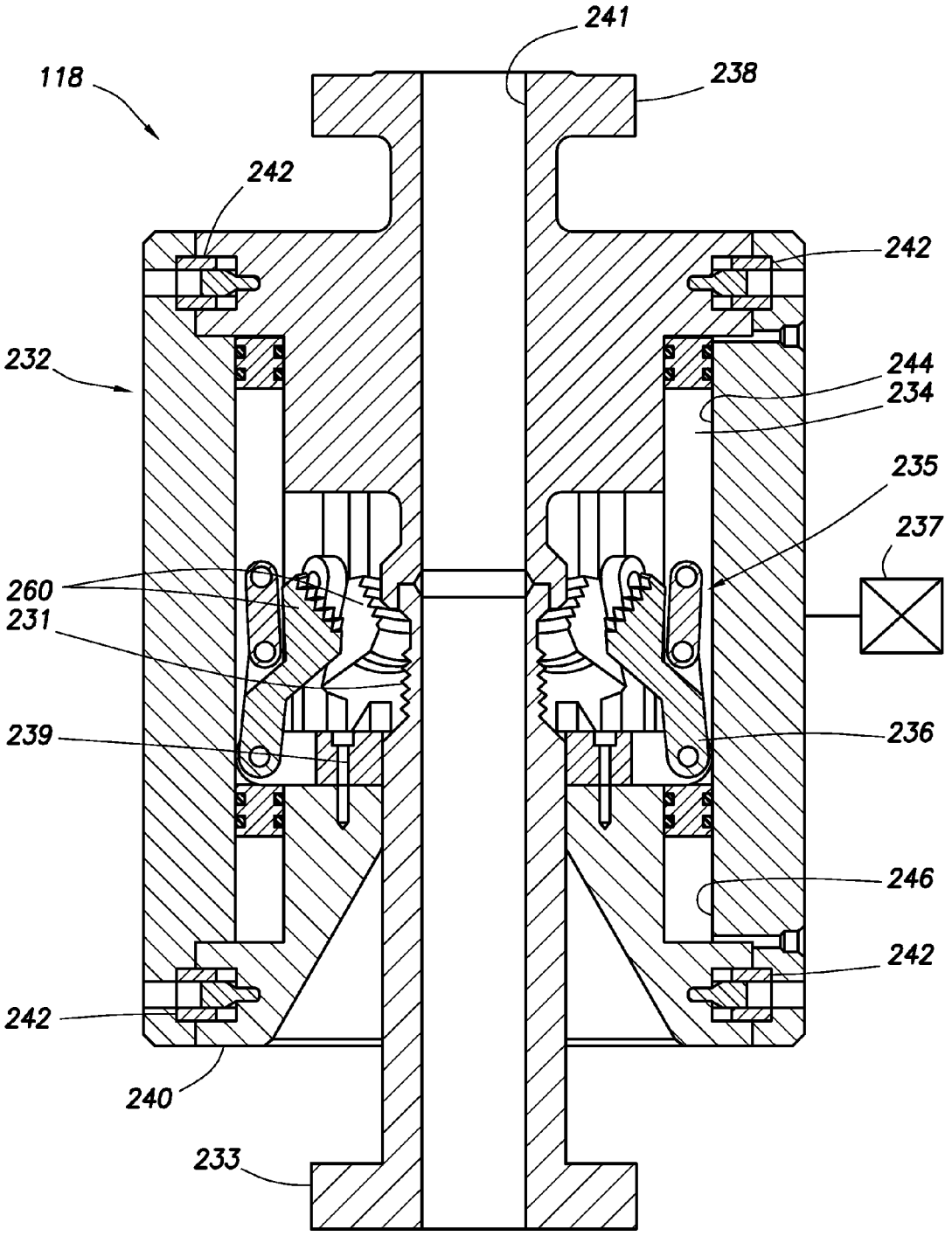

241
118
238
242
242
232
244
234
235
237
260
231
239
236
246
242
242
240
233

FIG.2A

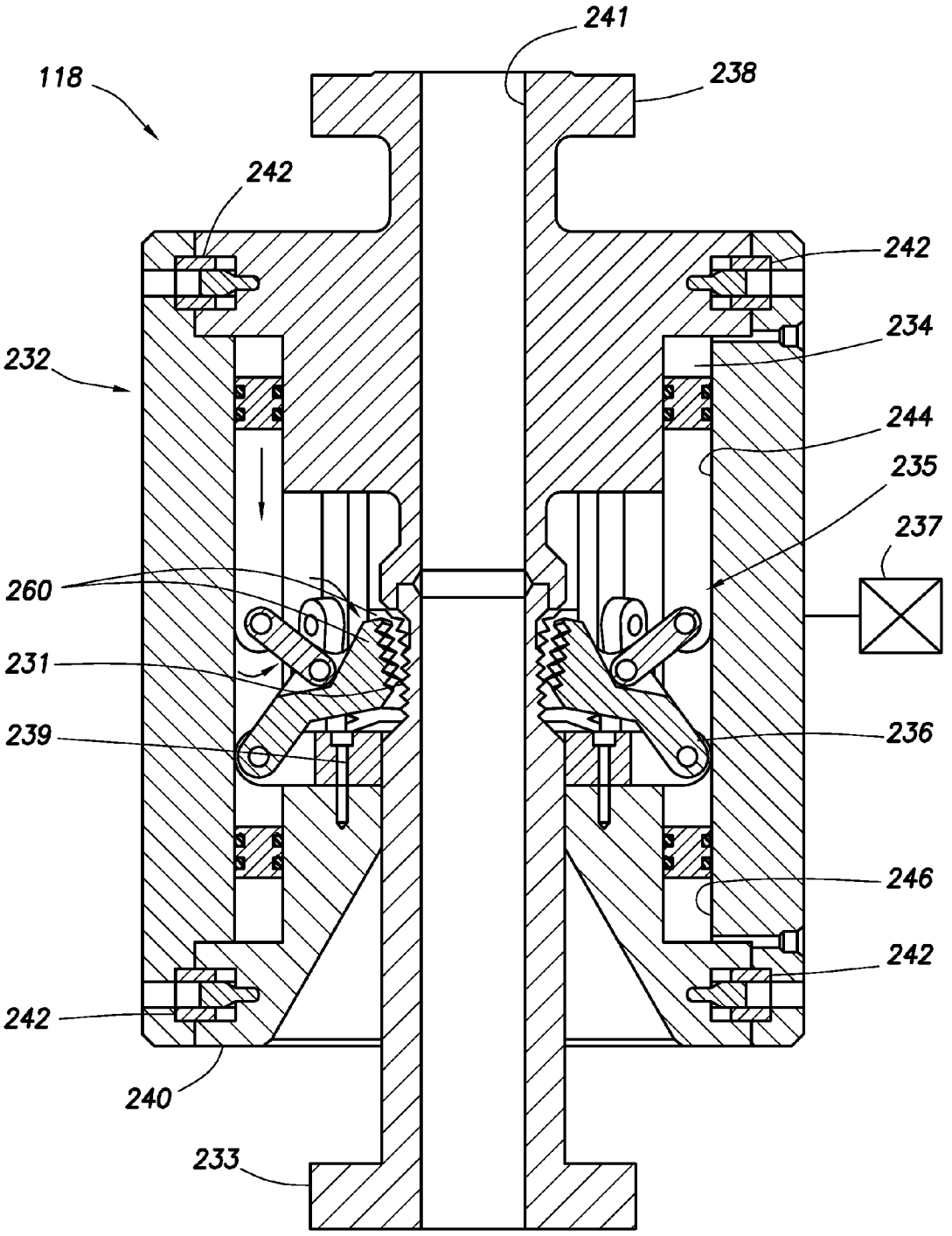

241
118
238
242
242
234
232
244
235
237
260
231
239
236
246
242
242
240
233

FIG.2B

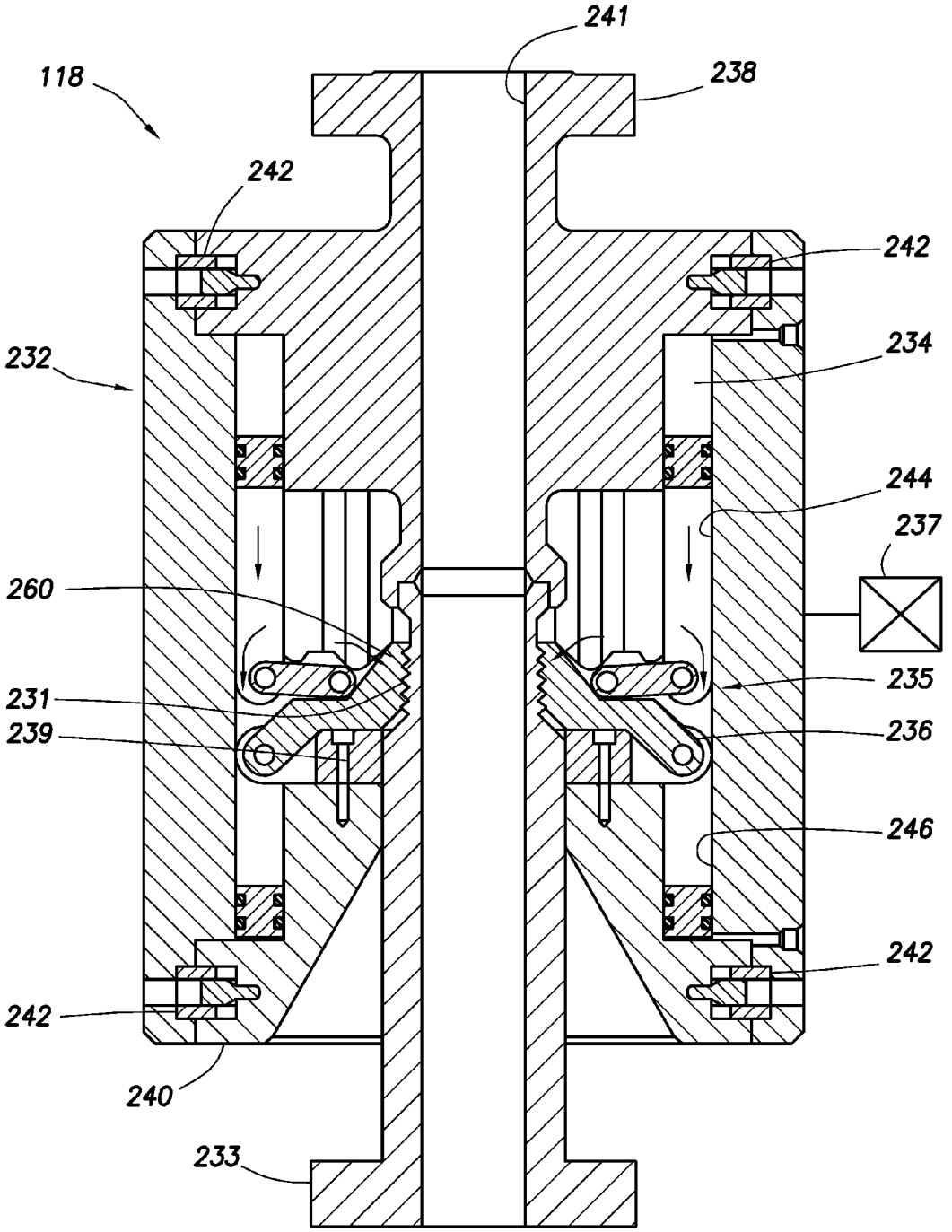

241
118
238
242
242
232
234
244
237
260
235
231
239
236
246
242
242
240
233

FIG.2C

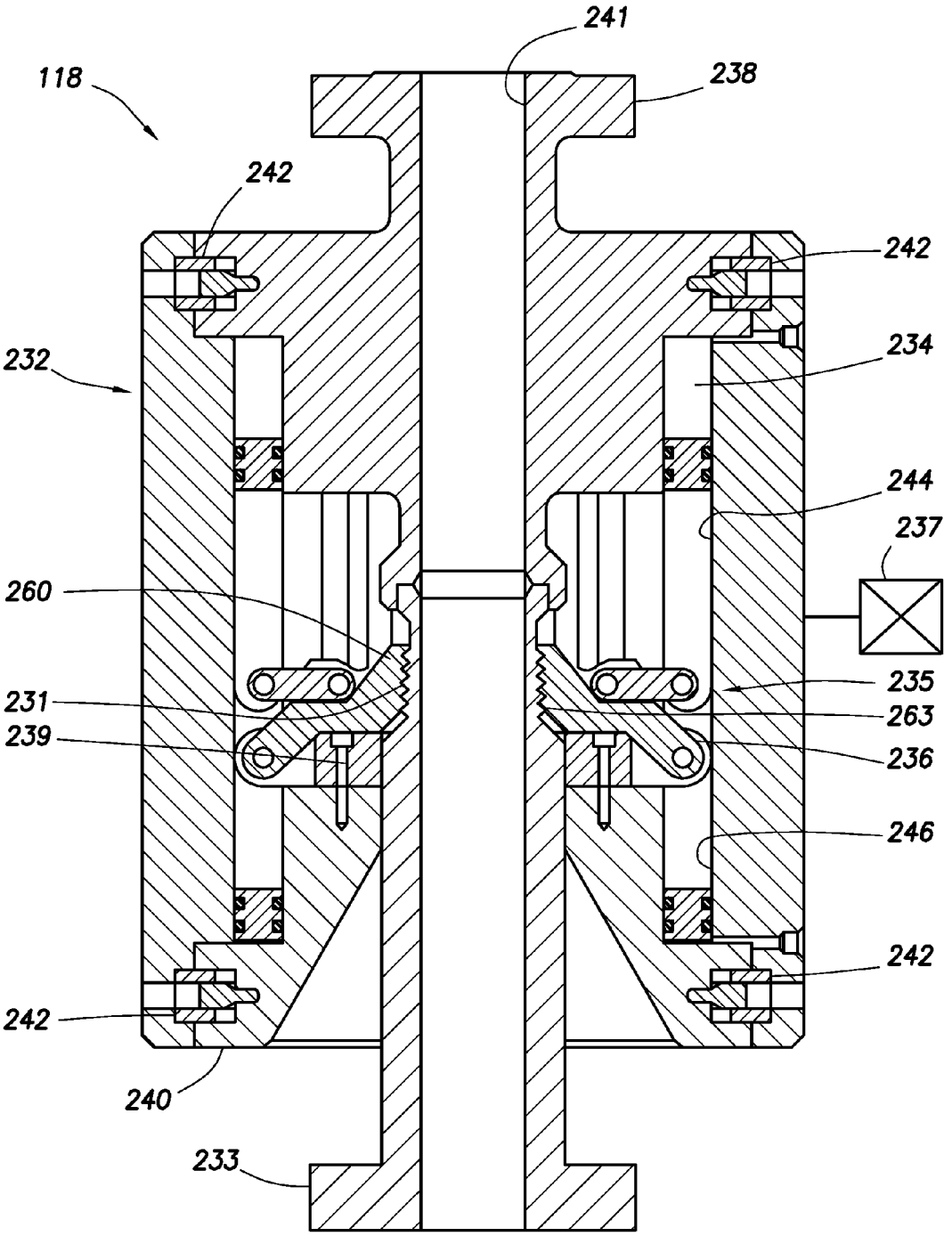

241
118
238
242
242
232
234
244
237
260
235
231
263
239
236
246
242
242
240
233

FIG.2D

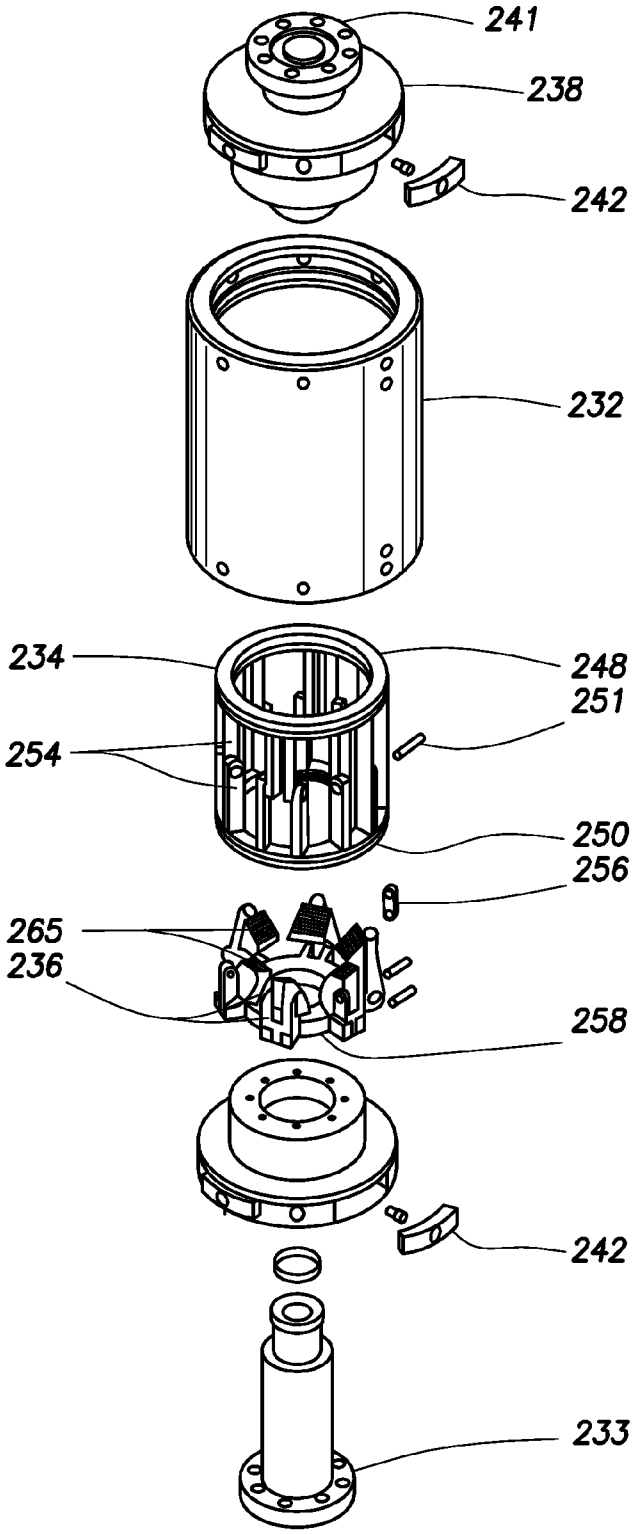


FIG.3

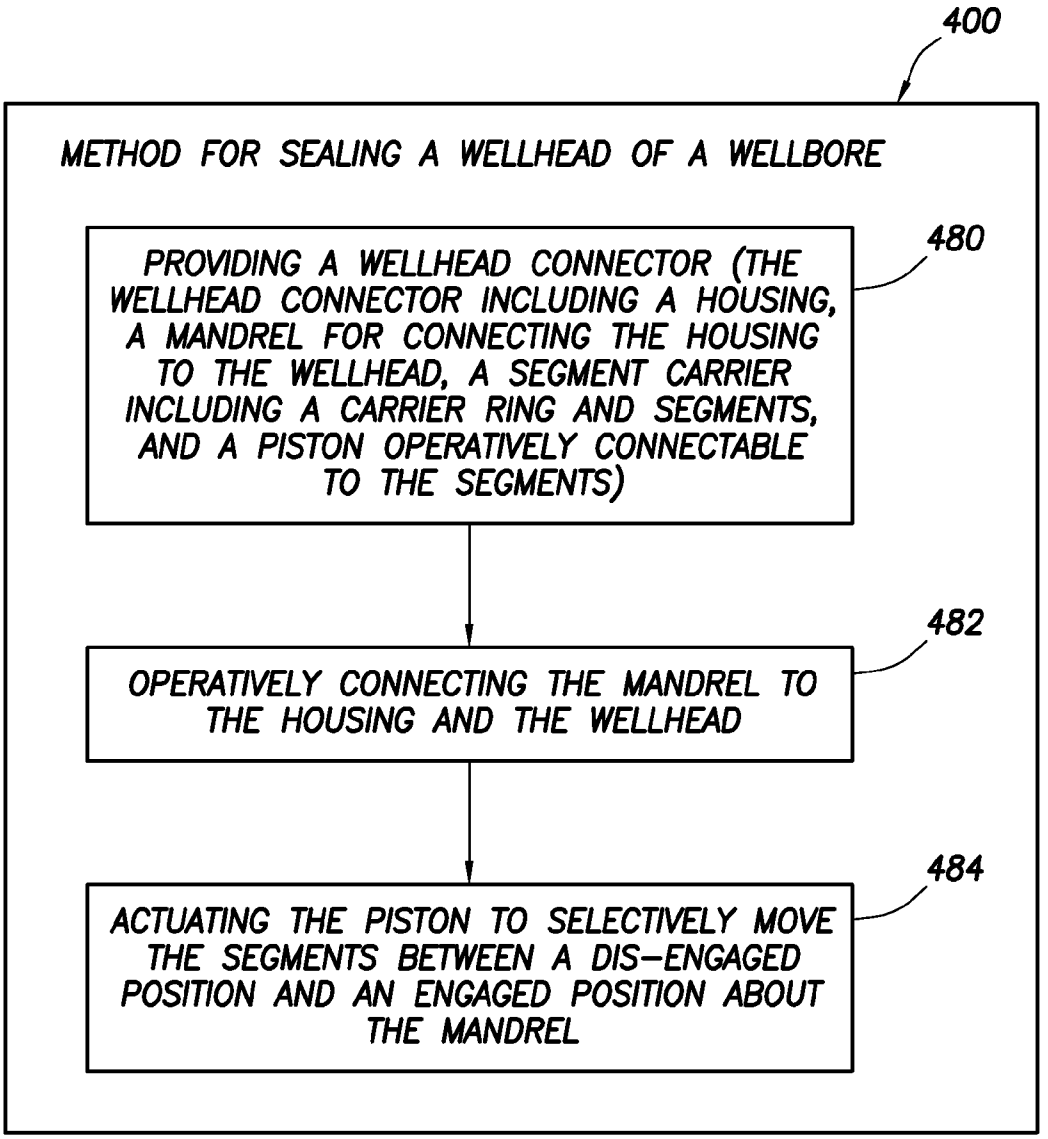

400
METHOD FOR SEALING A WELLHEAD OF A WELLBORE
PROVIDING A WELLHEAD CONNECTOR (THE WELLHEAD CONNECTOR INCLUDING A HOUSING, A MANDREL FOR CONNECTING THE HOUSING TO THE WELLHEAD, A SEGMENT CARRIER INCLUDING A CARRIER RING AND SEGMENTS, AND A PISTON OPERATIVELY CONNECTABLE TO THE SEGMENTS)
480
OPERATIVELY CONNECTING THE MANDREL TO THE HOUSING AND THE WELLHEAD
482
ACTUATING THE PISTON TO SELECTIVELY MOVE THE SEGMENTS BETWEEN A DIS-ENGAGED POSITION AND AN ENGAGED POSITION ABOUT THE MANDREL
484

FIG.4

WELLHEAD CONNECTOR AND METHOD OF USING SAME

BACKGROUND

This present invention relates generally to techniques for performing wellsite operations. More specifically, the present invention relates to techniques for sealing a wellhead of a wellbore.

Various oilfield operations may be performed to locate and gather valuable downhole fluids. Oil rigs are positioned at wellsites, and downhole tools, such as drilling tools, are deployed into the ground to reach subsurface reservoirs. Once the downhole tools form a wellbore (or borehole) to reach a desired reservoir, casings may be cemented into place within the wellbore, and the wellbore completed to initiate production of fluids from the reservoir. Tubulars (or tubular strings) may be provided for passing subsurface fluids to the surface.

A wellhead may be provided about a top of the wellbore for supporting casings and/or tubulars in the wellbore. A wellhead connector may be provided for connecting the wellhead to surface components, such as a blowout preventer (BOP) and/or a Christmas tree. Examples of wellhead connectors are described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,606,555 and 5,332,043.

Leakage of subsurface fluids may pose an environmental threat if released from the wellbore. A BOP may be positioned about the wellbore to form a seal about the tubular therein to prevent leakage of fluid as it is brought to the surface. Some BOPs may have selectively actuatable rams or ram bonnets, such as pipe or shear rams, for sealing and/or severing a tubular in a wellbore. Examples of BOPs and/or rams are provided in U.S. Pat. Nos. 7,367,396, 7,8149,79, and 2011/0000670. Some BOPs may be spherical (or rotating or rotary) BOPs as described, for example, in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,588,491 and 5,662,171.

SUMMARY

The techniques herein relate to a wellhead connector and related methods for sealing a wellhead. The wellhead connector includes a housing having a bore therethrough, a mandrel operatively connectable to the housing and the wellhead (the mandrel having a bore therethrough in fluid communication with the bore of the housing and the wellhead), a segment carrier positionable in the housing (the segment carrier including a carrier ring for receiving the lower flange and segments pivotally movable radially thereabout), and a piston operatively connectable to the segments. The piston is actuatable for moving the segments between a disengaged and an engaged position about the mandrel whereby the wellhead is selectively sealed.

The piston may include upper and lower piston rings with rods positioned therebetween, and be pressure balanced in the housing. The wellhead connector may also include linkages for operatively connecting the rods to the segments. The segments may be self-lockable by moving the linkages to an over-centered position normal to the rods. In the engaged position, the segments may converge and in the dis-engaged position the segments may diverge about the mandrel. The segments may include cutting tips for cutting through at least a portion of the mandrel, contact surfaces for deforming the mandrel, seals for forming a seal about the mandrel, grips for grippingly engaging the mandrel. The mandrel may have a neck portion for receiving the segments, and a flange end operatively connectable to the wellhead. The mandrel may be receivable in the housing through the receptacle and operatively connectable to a downhole end of the upper flange. The housing may include a tubular body, an upper flange and a lower receptacle. The wellhead connector may also have locking dogs for operatively connecting the upper flange and the lower receptacle to the housing. The wellhead connector, an actuator for actuating the piston and a controller may be part of a wellhead system.

The wellhead connector may be provided as part of a method of sealing a wellhead involving operatively connecting the mandrel the housing and the wellhead, and actuating the piston to selectively move the segments between a disengaged position and an engaged position about the mandrel. The method may also involve forming a seal about the mandrel with the segments, deforming the mandrel with the segments, cutting the mandrel with the segments, and/or slidably moving the piston in the housing. The actuating may involve slidably moving the piston in the housing such that the linkages rotate the segments. The method may also involve self-locking the segments by moving the linkages to an over-centered position normal to the rods and/or pressure balancing the piston within the housing.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION DRAWINGS

So that the above recited features and advantages can be understood in detail, a more particular description, briefly summarized above, maybe had by reference to the embodiments thereof that are illustrated in the appended drawings. It is to be noted, however, that the appended drawings illustrate only typical embodiments and are, therefore, not to be considered limiting of its scope. The figures are not necessarily to scale and certain features and certain views of the figures may be shown exaggerated in scale or in schematic in the interest of clarity and conciseness.

FIG. **1** is a schematic view of an offshore wellsite having a wellhead connector positionable about a wellhead, the wellhead connector having an engagement assembly.

FIGS. **2**A-**2**D are cross-sectional views of the wellhead connector of FIG. **1** taken along line **2**-**2** depicting operation thereof.

FIG. **3** is an exploded view of the wellhead connector of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **4** is a flow chart depicting a method of sealing the wellhead.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The description that follows includes exemplary systems, apparatuses, methods, and instruction sequences that embody techniques of the subject matter herein. However, it is understood that the described embodiments may be practiced without these specific details.

The disclosure relates to a wellhead connector with an engagement assembly for sealing a wellhead. Scaling as used herein may relate to contacting, deforming, cutting (e.g., puncturing, piercing, severing or otherwise passing through at least a portion the wellhead), fluidly isolating and/or sealing part or all of the wellhead (and/or wellbore). The wellhead connector may be positioned about the wellhead for sealing the wellhead (e.g., in the event of a leak, a blowout, or other occurrence). The wellhead connector may have a cylindrical configuration with a mandrel for connection with the wellhead, and may be provided with a pressure-balanced piston for activating wedge-shaped segments to engage the mandrel. The cylindrical configuration and pressure balanced piston may be used to reduce and/or balance pressure effects of the wellhead connector. The wellhead connector may be used to achieve one or more of the following, among others: reduced

pressure, modular components, reduced weight, enhanced efficiency, reduced cost, locking and/or self-locking capabilities, etc.

FIG. **1** depicts an offshore wellsite **100** having a subsea system **102** and a surface system **104**. The wellsite **100** is described as being a subsea operation, but may be for any wellsite environment (e.g., land or water based). The subsea system **102** includes a tubular **106** extending from a wellhead **110** and into a wellbore **112** in a sea floor **114**. A wellhead connector **118** is positioned above the wellhead **110** for sealing as will be described further herein. A BOP **116** is shown connected above the wellhead connector **118**. One or more other components may be connected above and/or below the wellhead connector **118** and/or the BOP **116**. For example, the subsea system **102** may have various devices, such as a stripper and a tubing delivery system (not shown). A controller **120** is provided for operating, monitoring and/or controlling the wellhead connector **118**, the BOP **116** and/or other portions of the wellsite **100**.

The surface system **104** includes a rig **124**, a platform **126** (or vessel), a tubing **128** and a surface controller **122**. The tubing **128** extends from the platform **126** to the BOP **116** for passing fluid to the surface. Part or all of the tubing **128** and/or tubular **106** may pass through the wellhead connector **118** and/or BOP **116** for fluid communication therebetween. The surface controller **122** is provided for operating, monitoring and/or controlling the rig **124**, platform **126** and/or other portions of the wellsite **100**.

As shown the surface controller **122** is at a surface location and the subsea controller **120** is at a subsea location. However, it will be appreciated that the one or more controllers **120**/**122** may be located at various locations to control the surface **104** and/or the subsea systems **102**. Communication links **130** may be provided for communication with various parts of the wellsite **100**, such as the controllers **120**/**122**.

FIGS. **2**A-**2**D and **3** show the wellhead connector **118** of FIG. **1** in greater detail. The wellhead connector **118** includes a housing **232**, a mandrel **233**, and an engagement assembly **235**. The housing **232** is a modular tubular structure defining a pressure vessel for securing to the wellhead **110**, closing around the mandrel **233**, and for preventing fluid (e.g., drilling mud, gas, oil, water or other fluid) from escaping the wellbore **112** (see FIG. **1**). The housing **232** may be configured to handle pressures in excess of about 16,000 psi (1125.2 kg/cm2) and various tubing diameters (e.g., about 18¾" (47.62 cm)).

The housing **232** has an upper flange **238** and a lower receptacle **240** connected thereto with a bore **241** therethrough for receiving a tubular (e.g., tubular **106** and/or tubing **128** of FIG. **1**) not shown. The upper flange **238** and lower receptacle **240** may be connected to other wellsite components, such as one or more BOPs and/or other components. Locking dogs **242** or other connectors may be provided for connecting the upper flange **238** and lower receptacle **240** to the tubular body. The locking dogs **242** are distributed radially about the upper and lower flanges **238**,**240** for connection with the housing **232**. While the housing **232** and upper and lower flanges **238** and **240** are depicted in a certain configuration as separate pieces, the housing **232** may be integral with various flanges or other components or provided in one or more pieces.

The mandrel **233** extends through the lower receptacle **240** and connects to the upper flange **242**. The mandrel **233** is a tubular component with a bore therethrough in fluid communication with the bore **241** for passing a tubular, such as tubular **106**, tubing **128** and/or fluids therethrough. A lower end of the mandrel **233** is connectable directly or indirectly (e.g., by additional components) to a wellhead **110**. In some versions, the mandrel **233** may be integral with the wellhead **110**. An upper end of the mandrel **233** may be connected to a lower end of the upper flange **242**.

The engagement assembly **118** includes a piston **234** and a carrier **236** actuatable by an actuator **237**. The piston **234** is a cylindrical component slidably positionable in the housing **232** along the upper flange **238** and the lower receptacle **240**. The housing **232** has an inner surface shaped to receive the piston **234**. The upper flange **238** has a shoulder defining an upper piston channel **244** between the upper flange **238** and the housing **232**. The lower receptacle **240** has a shoulder defining a lower piston channel **246** between the lower flange **240** and the housing **232**. The upper and lower piston channels **244**,**246** arc configured to receive the piston **234**.

The actuator **237** may be, for example, a hydraulic actuator for adjusting pressure in the upper and/or lower piston channels **244**, **246** for selectively moving the piston **234**. The housing **232** may have a port (not shown) for selectively releasing pressure. The piston **234** may be slidably movable in the upper piston channel **244** and the lower piston channel **246**, respectively. The piston **234** may be used to provide a balanced pressure configuration within the cylindrical housing **232**. The piston **234** is positionable in the housing **232** such that internal pressure is 'cancelled out' during operation. The piston **234** includes elliptical piston rings **248**, **250** on each end thereof with a plurality of rods **254** positioned radially thereabout between the piston rings **248**, **250**. Linkages **256** are pivotally connected to the rods **254**. Various connectors **251** may be provided for securing the rods **254** in position. In the pressure balanced configuration, the piston **234** is movable within the piston channels **244**, **246** for interaction with the segments **260** of carrier **236** such that pressure is distributed thereabout.

The carrier **236** includes an elliptical ring **258** positioned in the housing **232** adjacent the upper flange **238**. Bolts **239** may be used to secure the elliptical carrier ring **258** to the lower receptacle **238**. The elliptical carrier ring **258** has a plurality of segments **260** pivotally connected thereto. The segments **260** are positionable radially about the elliptical ring **258** and coupled to the linkages **256**. Movement of the piston **254** through the housing **232** may be used to move the linkages **256** and the segments **260** connected thereto. Thus, the movement of the piston **234** and linkages **256** may be used to selectively move the segments **260**.

FIGS. **2**A-**2**D show the piston **234** and the carrier **236** in various positions. As shown in FIG. **2**A, the piston **234** is in an extended position at an upper end of the housing **232** with the linkages **256** in linear alignment with rods **254**. In this position, the linkages **256** are retracted and the segments **260** are in a disengaged position away from the mandrel **233**.

The linkages **256** are pivotally movable about the rods **254** to an extended position as the piston **234** slides downwardly within the housing **232**. FIGS. **2**B-**2**C have directional arrows showing the piston **234** as it moves downwards to the lower piston channel **246**, and the linkages **256** are moved to the extended position of FIG. **2**D.

The linkages **256** may be pivotally rotated to an extended (or horizontal) position perpendicular to the rods **254**. As the linkages **256** rotate, the segments **260** are pivotally rotated to an engaged (or converged) position about the mandrel **233** as shown in FIG. **2**D. The segments **260** arc positionable about the mandrel **233** at various positions and/or variable diameters. The segments **260** are configurable to a desired pipe and/or engagement diameter. The stroke and/or dimensions of the piston **234** may be adjusted such that the linkages **256**

move the segments **260** to achieve the desired engagement diameter and/or engagement force.

The piston **234** may also be configured to be 'self-locking' by positioning the linkages **256** in an over-centered position as shown in FIG. **2**D. In this over-centered position, the piston **234** has moved upward to a bottom end position at or near a bottom of lower piston channel **246**, the linkages **256** have rotated into a locked position adjacent the segments **260** and normal to the rods **254**, and the segments **260** have rotated into a locked position adjacent a lower end of upper flange **238**. The piston **234** may be moved back to the retracted positions of FIGS. **2**A-**2**C, for example, by applying hydraulic pressure to move the piston **234** toward the upper piston channel **244**.

In some cases, the segments **260** may be positioned in sealing engagement with an outer surface of the mandrel **233**, or extend through the mandrel **233** thereby cutting the mandrel **233**. The segments **260** may have inner surfaces **263** for engagement with a neck **265** of the mandrel **233** and/or seals for sealing engagement with the mandrel **233** as shown in FIG. **2**D. The inner surfaces **263** may have grooves for gripping engagement with the mandrel **233**, cutting tips for cutting through the mandrel **233**, and/or seals for sealing engagement with the mandrel **233**. The mandrel **233** may have a neck portion **231** for receiving the segments **260**. The neck portion **231** may have corresponding grips may be providing on mandrel **233** for receiving the surfaces **263**. Various tips, surfaces, grips and combinations may be provided along one or more of the segments **260** for providing desired engagement.

FIG. **4** shows a flow chart of a method **400** of sealing a wellhead. The method involves providing **480** a wellhead connector. The wellhead connector includes a housing having a bore therethrough, a mandrel for connecting the housing to the wellhead, a segment carrier positionable in the housing (the segment carrier including a carrier ring and a plurality of segments radially positionable thereabout), and a piston. The method further involves operatively connecting **482** the wellhead connector to the wellhead, and actuating **484** the piston to selectively move the plurality of segments between a disengaged and an engaged position about the mandrel.

The method may also involve sealing, deforming, and/or cutting the mandrel **233** with the segments, slidably moving the piston in the housing and/or self-locking the plurality of segments by over-centering the linkages in the housing. The piston may include a pair of piston rings with a plurality of rods extending therebetween (the plurality of rods operatively connected to the plurality of segments by a plurality of linkages) and the method may further involve slidably moving the piston in the housing such that the linkages rotate the plurality of segments. The steps may be performed in any order, and repeated as desired.

It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the techniques disclosed herein can be implemented for automated/autonomous applications via software configured with algorithms to perform the desired functions. These aspects can be implemented by programming one or more suitable general-purpose computers having appropriate hardware. The programming may be accomplished through the use of one or more program storage devices readable by the processor(s) and encoding one or more programs of instructions executable by the computer for performing the operations described herein. The program storage device may take the form of, e.g., one or more floppy disks; a CD ROM or other optical disk; a read-only memory chip (ROM); and other forms of the kind well known in the art or subsequently developed. The program of instructions may be "object code," i.e., in binary form that is executable more-or-less directly by the computer; in "source code" that requires compilation or interpretation before execution; or in some intermediate form such as partially compiled code. The precise forms of the program storage device and of the encoding of instructions are immaterial here. Aspects of the invention may also be configured to perform the described functions (via appropriate hardware/software) solely on site and/or remotely controlled via an extended communication (e.g., wireless, internet, satellite, etc.) network.

While the embodiments are described with reference to various implementations and exploitations, it will be understood that these embodiments are illustrative and that the scope of the inventive subject matter is not limited to them. Many variations, modifications, additions and improvements are possible. For example, one or more wellhead connectors, BOPs and/or BOP components may be used to seal the wellhead.

Plural instances may be provided for components, operations or structures described herein as a single instance. In general, structures and functionality presented as separate components in the exemplary configurations may be implemented as a combined structure or component. Similarly, structures and functionality presented as a single component may be implemented as separate components. These and other variations, modifications, additions, and improvements may fall within the scope of the inventive subject matter.

What is claimed is:

1. A wellhead connector for a wellhead of a wellbore penetrating a subterranean formation, the wellhead connector comprising:

a housing having a bore therethrough;

a mandrel operatively connectable to the housing and the wellhead, the mandrel having a bore therethrough in fluid communication with the bore of the housing and the wellhead;

a segment carrier positionable in the housing, the segment carrier comprising a carrier ring operatively connectable to the mandrel and a plurality of segments pivotally connectable to the carrier ring and movable radially thereabout;

a plurality of linkages, each of the plurality of linkages having a first end and a second end, the first end pivotally connectable to the plurality of segments; and

a piston pivotally connectable to the second end of the plurality of linkages, the piston actuatable to move the plurality of segments via the plurality of linkages between a disengaged and an engaged position about the mandrel whereby the wellhead is selectively sealed.

2. The wellhead connector of claim **1**, wherein the piston comprises upper and lower piston rings with a plurality of rods positioned therebetween.

3. The wellhead connector of claim **2**, wherein the piston is pressure balanced in the housing.

4. The wellhead connector of claim **1**, wherein the plurality of segments are self-lockable by moving the plurality of linkages to an over-centered position normal to the plurality of rods.

5. The wellhead connector of claim **1**, wherein in the engaged position the plurality of segments converge, and in the dis-engaged position the plurality of segments diverge about the mandrel.

6. The wellhead connector of claim **1**, wherein the plurality of segments comprise cutting tips to cut through at least a portion of the mandrel.

7. The wellhead connector of claim **1**, wherein the plurality of segments have contact surfaces to deform the mandrel.

8. The wellhead connector of claim 1, wherein the plurality of segments have seals sealable about the mandrel.

9. The wellhead connector of claim 1, wherein the plurality of segments have grips grippingly engageable about the mandrel.

10. The wellhead connector of claim 1, wherein the mandrel has a neck portion to receive the plurality of segments.

11. The wellhead connector of claim 1, wherein the mandrel has a flange end operatively connectable to the wellhead.

12. The wellhead connector of claim 1, wherein the mandrel is receivable in the housing through the receptacle and operatively connectable to a downhole end of an upper flange of the housing.

13. The wellhead connector of claim 1, wherein the housing comprises a tubular body, an upper flange and a lower receptacle.

14. The wellhead connector of claim 13, further comprising locking dogs operatively connecting the upper flange and the lower receptacle to the tubular body.

15. A wellhead system for a wellhead of a wellbore penetrating a subterranean formation, the wellhead system comprising:

a wellhead connector, comprising:

a housing having a bore therethrough;

a mandrel operatively connectable to the housing and the wellhead, the mandrel having a bore therethrough in fluid communication with the bore of the housing and the wellhead;

a segment carrier positionable in the housing, the segment carrier comprising a carrier ring operatively connectable to the mandrel and a plurality of segments connectable to the carrier ring and pivotally movable radially thereabout;

a plurality of linkages, each of the plurality of linkages having a first end and a second end, the first end pivotally connectable to the plurality of segments; and

a piston pivotally connectable to the second end of the plurality of linkages, the plurality of linkages actuatable to move the plurality of segments via the plurality of linkages between a disengaged and an engaged position about the mandrel whereby the wellhead is selectively sealed; and

an actuator to actuate the piston.

16. The system of claim 15, further comprising a controller.

17. A method for sealing a wellhead of a wellbore penetrating a subterranean formation, the method comprising:

providing a wellhead connector, the wellhead connector comprising:

a housing having a bore therethrough;

a mandrel having a bore therethrough in fluid communication with the bore of the housing and the wellhead;

a segment carrier positionable in the housing, the segment carrier comprising a carrier ring operatively connectable to the mandrel and a plurality of segments connectable to the carrier ring and pivotally movable radially thereabout;

a plurality of linkages, each of the plurality of linkages having a first end and a second end, the first end pivotally connectable to the plurality of segments; and

a piston pivotally connectable to the second end of the plurality of linkages;

operatively connecting the mandrel to the housing and the wellhead; and

actuating the piston to selectively move the plurality of segments via the plurality of linkages between a disengaged position and an engaged position about the mandrel.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the actuating comprises forming a seal about the mandrel with the plurality of segments.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein the actuating comprises deforming the mandrel with the plurality of segments.

20. The method of claim 17, wherein the actuating comprises cutting the mandrel with the plurality of segments.

21. The method of claim 17, wherein the actuating comprises slidably moving the piston in the housing.

22. The method of claim 17, wherein the piston comprises a pair of piston rings with a plurality of rods extending therebetween, the plurality of rods operatively connected to the plurality of segments by the plurality of linkages and wherein the actuating comprises slidably moving the piston in the housing such that the plurality of linkages rotate the plurality of segments.

23. The method of claim 22, further comprising self-locking the plurality of segments by moving the plurality of linkages to an over-centered position normal to the plurality of rods.

24. The method of claim 22, further comprising pressure balancing the piston within the housing.

* * * * *